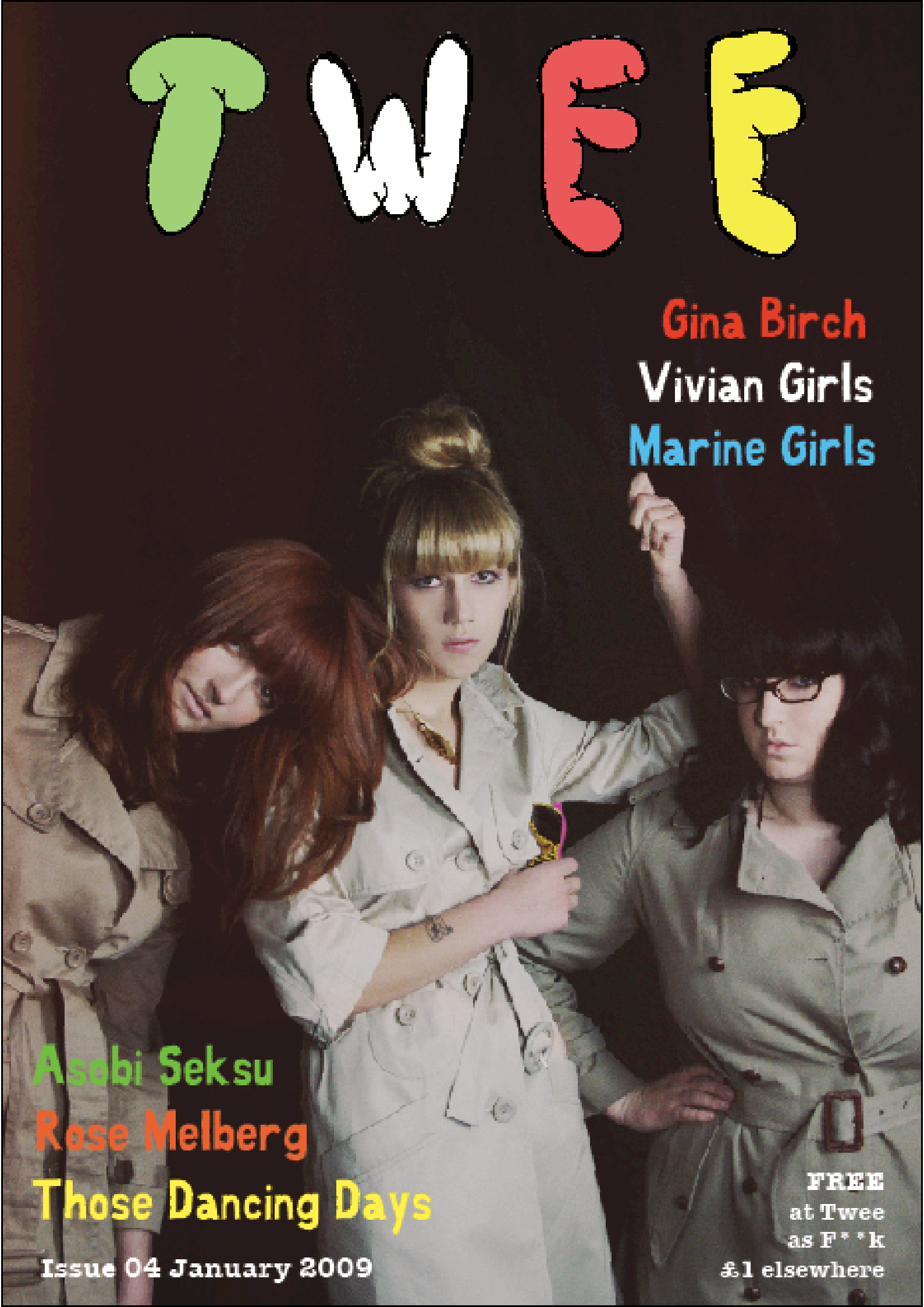
TWEE

Gina Birch

Vivian Girls

Marine Girls



Asobi Seksu

Rose Melberg

Those Dancing Days

Issue 04 January 2009

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Hello!

And welcome to the fourth issue of *Twee*. An issue full of feminine charm and mystique, an issue full of girls. We like girls a lot. Especially girls who play guitars and form pop bands; girls like Those Dancing Days, Vivian Girls and Yuki Chikudate of Asobi Seksu. We were especially excited to be able to talk to the absolutely legendary Gina Birch (The Raincoats), Gina Hartman (Marine Girls) and Rose Melberg (Tiger Trap, The Softies). Inspirations all.

That's not to say we don't like boys too, so thank you very much David Keegan for telling us all we wanted to know about The Shop Assistants!

We hope you enjoy reading about our indiepop heroines as much as we did writing about them.

Lots of love TAF xxx
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Thanks to:
Laura Bell, David Keegan, Vivian Girls, Those Dancing Days, both Ginas, Yuki and James, Rose Melberg, Jon & Woodie, Erik Sandberg, Amy Simpson

Visit www.tweeasfuck.com for an extended colour version of the fanzine.

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Those Dancing Days

Words: Rory Mackie
Photo: Pavla Kopecna

Since their eponymous debut single arrived, seemingly out of nowhere, Those Dancing Days have been one of our biggest pop crushes, crashing into the nation's consciousness. Their intoxicating mix of Northern Soul, 60s girl groups and Swedish indiepop is like something pop scientists might have cooked up in the lab at our request after we faxed through the TAF blueprint for a perfect pop band.

TAF: As this is a grrrl-centric issue of *Twee*, can you tell us a bit about the female musicians who have inspired you?

Rebecca (guitar): Cat Power is really cool.
Mimi (bass): And Kate Bush.
Sisi (drums): I like the band ESG, and there's a Swedish band called Sahara Hotnights, the only famous Swedish girl band. When I was younger it was a huge inspiration to know that an all-girl band can have success.

TAF: Your debut album *In Our Space Hero Suits* has had a great reception in the UK. It must be a good feeling to have been received so warmly in a country other than your own...

M: Yes, because we're not accepted in our own, so it's nice to be somewhere! No, it's not that bad, but I think it's great to be big in England especially, because England really likes music, really cares about music. It's not like you can be big here with just one song, it's great that it's been more than one song for us.
S: You have such a good pop music heritage here, that it's an honour.
Lisa (keyboards): The music scene is more interesting here than in Sweden. When you read reviews over here, compared to the Swedish press, you feel that music journalists have really got what we're about, have really listened to the music. In Sweden it's a bit more, "oh, they're just girls, they can't play."
Liniya (vocals): It feels like they (the Swedish Press) are just looking for things to criticise, while here they are really analysing everything, it's a completely different way of writing.

TAF: I think we have, in Britain, a history of over-intellectualising pop music, but that's a good thing right? It shows we care...

M: It's really hard to read music articles here because they use really weird...words!
Lis: It's hard to be a prophet in your own town.
S: That's what my mum used to say!

TAF: We did a feature on Swedish indiepop in the last issue, and the band Bridal Shop said exactly the same thing, the exact same quote.

R: It does put a finger on it...
M: Especially for us Swedish people!

TAF: There does seem to be a British fixation with Swedish indiepop, there are at least two clubs here just playing Swedish music, for example. Is that something you're aware of? Do you feel like you're a part of a Swedish 'scene'?

R: I think journalists often say that, "oh there are so many good Swedish bands, how do you feel about being one of those." I think a lot of people really like Sweden in some way, it's more like an interest in Sweden *overall*. I don't really get why.
Lin: Also, it's really hard to succeed in Sweden, so a lot of bands go abroad. We actually did England before Sweden, we'd rather come here.

TAF: I think that's quite common now.

Lin: Yeah, I do too. That's why there are a lot of Swedish bands coming over.
M: And there are a lot of good Swedish bands.

S: There's a much bigger population in England too, so we can play outside London and still there are enough people that want to come and see us. In Sweden if you play outside the main cities you'd get ten or fifteen people turning up.

TAF: How did you all meet and how did the band form?

R: I've known Lisa and Sisi since we were children and we were all in a band before this one. We wanted to start a new band and Sisi knew Mimi from...
S: ...a language course in England.
R: Torquay!
M: England brought us together...
R: ... and Sisi knew Mimi played bass and wanted to join our band, and we kicked Lisa out, who played bass in our last band! [Lisa eventually joined TDD on keyboards]
Lin: Me and Mimi knew each other as well.
M: ...we were in the same class....
R: So that's how we started to play

TAF: And the name is from the Led Zeppelin song? Are there Led Zep fans in the band?

Lis: Just Mimi!
S: I've started listening to them now.
R: Me too.
S:...but I've only heard the album with the number two on [*Led Zeppelin II*] .
M: It has nothing to do with the song really.
Lis: It's just a good name.

TAF: You just liked how it sounds?

S: It's a good message.

TAF: I have to say, and I don't mean to offend anyone, but I *hate* Led Zeppelin. So I'm glad there's no musical influence there. I much prefer Those Dancing Days.

M: Me too.
Lis: That's funny though, because everyone else has been like, "oh, I really love Led Zeppelin".

TAF: It's probably an example of the English over-intellectualising pop again, but I just think that music was going brilliantly, until all these big rock bands in the early Seventies started getting all sweaty and doing five minute drum solos.

M: I don't really see them as a metal band though, which a lot of people say about them.

TAF: I just like three-minute pop songs, I guess, and those bands kind of killed that for a while.

R: It's good that people have different opinions though, otherwise things would get really boring.

TAF: Exactly I mean, I don't want to fight you for it.

Lis: Argument! Argument!
M: [deadpan] I'm going to leave now.

TAF: And what's the writing process within the band? Is there a main songwriter?

S: We write the songs together. With the lyrics, each one of us sits at home and comes up with something, then we show the others, maybe Rebbeca has something on guitar...
M: It's kind of like jamming together; the songs, the lyrics...
R: I think it's good that it's not one person going, "play this, play that, play this" because that's why we have this sound, we all get to add our own little spice to the soup.
Lis: To our Pop-soup!

TAF: To me 'Those Dancing Days' the song, is a perfect pop single. Did you know you'd come up with something special when you wrote it?

S: I don't think so.
Lin: That was a song that we wrote together. I don't remember how it happened exactly, but I remember sitting on the floor writing lines down and putting them together.
S: Lisa started something on the keyboard and I just played the same thing, but on the drums, and that was the intro basically.
M: I don't remember making it, don't remember when we did it.
S: I remember when we wrote the song, we had a very clear feeling; "this is what we want to catch."
M: I remember that we wanted to have the phrase 'Those Dancing Days' *in* the song.
S: Yes! "Let's catch [the essence of] 'Those Dancing Days'".
Lis: We were thinking about the feeling you get at a festival, "Dancing In The Night, Dancing Through The Days".
S: When everything is fun.
Lin: I think of it more like Summer.
Lis: When we recorded it, I think we started to hear it in a different way. When we were writing it and rehearsing it was different to the recorded version, and we were like, "oh, so this is how it sounds".
M: We had a really bad rehearsal studio so when we recorded the songs for the first time we had no idea [what they would sound like] and we didn't even know how Liniya sounded because the acoustic in our rehearsal studio was so bad. So that was a nice surprise!
Lis: When we recorded 'Those Dancing Days' we had to play it forty-four times because we were so out of time. It's actually cut together from forty different takes.
R: And it's still a bit wrong...
M: [mock horrified] Don't tell him that!

TAF: So it's similar musically, to how the song 'Shuffle' (which is made up of lots of different song titles) is lyrically?

All: [pretending to be impressed] Ooohh!
Lin: [deadpan] That's deep.
M: Ah, but we were new in those days, when we did that song we were so new...
Lin: It's the mistakes that make wour music. Like 'Hitten' in the beginning, there was a mistake, "Oooooohweoowwww" [does spot on impression of a Hammond Organ slowly grinding to a halt.]

TAF: But it sounds great!

M: And it happens once more in the song, and it's *perfect*.

TAF: It's an especially fitting mistake, as the refrain from 'Hitten' is, "Slow Down, Slow Down."

All: [mockingly again] Oooh!

TAF: Moving swiftly on, you seem to have been on tour, or playing all over Europe, for months now...

Lin: With most bands, they release an album and then they're out on tour all over the world for a year or so. But it's not like that with us, we go out for a week, then we get to go home and then we go on tour for another two weeks or so.
M: We always come home for a couple of days in the middle, it's nice, you have to come back to reality sometimes.
R: I think we need that!
Lis: The longest we've been out is three weeks.
M: But that worked really well, I think it's easier to be out for three weeks than a couple of little one-week tours.
Lis: It was so much fun!
M: If you get it into your head that you're going to be out that long and come to terms with it, then it's no problem.
R: It's fun with the smaller tours though as we tend to name them all, like we had the 'Almost Famous' tour.
M: And the 'Almost Scotland' tour! We played in Ireland and I thought it was Scotland. I wrote on MySpace that we'd be playing in Dublin, Scotland! People got very angry...
Lis: And this tour is the 'Almost Pretty' tour.
R: 'Almost Sober'!
M: 'The Scotland For Real' tour!

TAF: Any future projects? Do you plan to diversify in any way? Computer Games? Movies?

R: We're really looking forward to making the second album, to writing with each other again, we miss that. Because we've been playing with each other for a while now and we're more confident, I think it'll be better than the first one.
Lin: And you know the Bratz dolls?, Well, this an exclusive, next year; Those Dancing Days Bratz. We're also planning to introduce a range of umbrellas that heat up when it starts snowing. They'll fold out into a kind of a bubble, play music and maybe squirt foam. Warm foam.

www.myspace.com/thosedancingdays

ASOBI SEKSU

Words: Rory Mackie
Photo & styling: Pavla Kopecna | Hair: Tomi Kono | Make-up: Sofia Bermudez

Feted by critics and music-lovers alike for their lush, textured sound (that has attracted comparisons to the likes of My Bloody Valentine and The Cocteau Twins) Asobi Seksu are at the vanguard of a generation of bands taking inspiration from the sonic experimentalism of the so-called 'shoegaze' scene of the early nineties. New album Hush, however, is something of a departure for the Brooklyn nu-gazers, seeing them take a step away from the densely layered atmospherics that made their name, in favour of a more stripped back, considered sound.

Over omelettes and veggie-burgers in our local greasy spoon, we quizzed the band's co-songwriters, James and Yuki, on touring with Ladytron, the restrictive atmosphere of classical music schools and why it's a really, really bad idea to kill a baby bird whilst out of your mind on mushrooms...

TAF: So the new album seems like a little bit of a departure, it's still the Asobi Seksu sound but more stripped back, not as many layers. Was this due to a new confidence in the songs?

James: To a certain extent. And that we really didn't want to repeat ourselves, to do the same thing again, have the same texture and make it a million reverb guitars again. It would have been easy for us to go in and do *Citrus* part two, but we really didn't want to make the same album again.

Yuki: We're sort of coming in to our own a little more and understanding what we want to sound like. We were a little extreme in our approach at first in that we decided we only wanted one of everything, which obviously didn't turn out to be the case. But we built it back up in the studio in way that interested us. We let the songs breathe a little more, and we had the confidence to just let the songs be and speak for themselves. And we had fun experimenting with synths and keyboards this time.

TAF: Which leads me on to my next question, which is probably the one you get asked in every single interview - the dreaded Shoegaze word. Is it a conscious influence for you? Do you feel any kind of kinship with those bands? Do you get bored of the comparisons?

J: I get bored of it, but it's understandable because it is obviously a huge influence on us, though not the only one. Maybe the My Bloody Valentine comparisons go a little far, they're one of my favourite bands, but just one of them, I listen to all kinds of ethereal, dreamy music.

Y: When we came up with the concept of doing this band together and we were thinking of what we wanted to sound like, the shogaze thing came up for sure. But there were a lot of other influences as well, We love Lee Ranaldo and Thurston Moore, Stereolab. Japanese rock music from the nineties is a big influence for us as well. And that was part of the reason we went with the name Asobi Seksu, ["playful sex" in Japanese] it's supposed to be tongue in cheek and fun and not so serious

about the whole thing, like the way Kahimi Karie approaches her music or Takako Minekawa, there is always something a little strange and just kind of wacky about their work and that was something we loved as well.

TAF: Are there any other influences that don't get talked about in interviews?

J: Yeah, people don't call us out on The Cure enough, I think – but it's there in a lot of the song writing, maybe because of the texture (we don't get comparisons) but Robert Smith is probably my favourite songwriter.

TAF: And you guys met at....

J: Manhattan School of Music.

Y: Believe it or not.

TAF: And that's like....? I'm imagining *Fame* basically.

Both: No!

TAF: More like a conservatoire?

J: It's probably the number two conservatory after Julliard and it's pretty stuck up and pompous and all the things you'd expect from a conservatory. I was doing classical guitar and Yuki was always doing classical piano. I'd always been in bands and was pretty dissatisfied with the idea of being a classical musician for life and so was she. So my band was falling apart and we began gradually writing songs together and it just kind of happened from there, Yuki was originally just playing keyboards and doing background vocals, but – I didn't want to sing – nobody wanted to sing – so it was like; "you sound the best – you're up".

Y: I was coerced into it, tricked into it and manipulated [laughs]. But it's a role I've become comfortable with and learned to accept.

TAF: And did you manage to finish your studies?

Y: I did graduate and everything, but it's just a degree that gathers dust.

J: Yeah we both graduated actually. I mean we didn't really have this band until after college; it was just messing around until then.

TAF: Neither of you had a burning desire to join an orchestra or become a soloist?

J: No. That was what it was. We both separately decided that this wasn't what we wanted to do. I always wanted to be in a rock band anyway. I mean I was always in bands and I fell into classical music, like 'Oh, I'm pretty good at this, I could go to college, it's a challenge" but I always just wanted to be in a band.

Y: I was kind of nervous about it, I didn't know anything about being in a band and what that would mean and what that would involve at my end. But James had been in bands forever, since Junior High School so it wasn't such a departure for him, more like going home...

TAF: And how's the tour going?

J: It's going well. Ladytron are super-nice and the shows have been good, the crowds have been great and it's easy - we're on early every night.

TAF: More time to get drunk after the show!

J: We don't really drink that much as a band, but if we did that'd be ideal.

Y: That's the thing with touring, you might think that there's a lot of hanging out going on but there's really not. It's

just a lot of driving and then a lot of waiting, then you play and say 'Hello and Goodbye' and that's it. I mean Ladytron are very sweet people, don't get me wrong, and I love running into them and making small talk, but it's like two minutes here and two minutes there.

J: We've just started really, London was good, Oxford was good, Leeds was cool but it was our first night and it was a disaster with us setting up as the crowd was coming in. Just like "oh what are we doing" with all our rental equipment it just felt like we had no idea what we were doing – but it was a good show actually.

TAF: I think the first night always has to be...

J: A complete disaster! Oh it has to be. You have to be late and it has to be stressful.

TAF: And usually the roof caves in.

J: Yup.

TAF: Yuki, is it strange being the only woman in the band whilst on tour?

Y: Luckily these guys are very sweet and very understanding and know when to give me space, they're very helpful, so I'm lucky, although I miss female companionship for sure.

TAF: And the LP is out in February? Are you proud of it? I'm a big fan, there are some lovely songs on there.

Y: When we first realised we had to write a new album we were a little overwhelmed and we weren't sure where we were going to go [with it], but once we had a couple of songs under our belts we were very excited and couldn't wait to get into the studio. It was a painstaking process, it took a little longer than we thought – it took three months when we thought it would take one - but we were lucky enough to be in a studio that was very flexible about the time and Chris [Zane – producer of *Hush*] was very patient with us.

J: I'm really proud of it. I'm curious how people that liked us before are going to respond to it.

TAF: I think that there's still an Asobi Seksu *thread* running through it.

J: I hope so, yeah.

TAF: It seems like a more confident album.

Y: We were definitely very conscious of that. We made a very dense record with *Citrus* and we knew that we wanted to have a little more breathing room with the new one.

J: We're pretty happy with it I gotta say, but I dunno, I'm a little nervous what people who like us for the big lush reverb are going to say.

TAF: You always seem to expect bad reviews!

J: Me? Yeah. I do, I do.

TAF: When I was researching this, there were all these instances of you saying. "yeah, it got really good reviews" and being absolutely shocked!

J: I know. Both records; this one and the last one I thought, "people are going to hate this record". We never expected anyone to like us. I think it's partly due to where we started from. When we started in New York it was like Strokes-mania, everyone was like "jang-jang-jang-jang-jang-jang-jang" [sings intro to 'Last Nite']. *Everybody*, like a million bands. Everybody was all new-wavey and sharp-dressed, not that we didn't

dress well, but they were super-highly styled.

TAF: I think things have moved more in your direction now, certainly in New York.

J: I know, and we really don't know what to do with it.

TAF: We were talking earlier about Crystal Stilts and I guess even Vivian Girls to a certain extent, all have that kind of reverb thing going on.

J: Yeah and that was certainly not the case when we started.

TAF: So do you feel more part of a sympathetic musical environment now?

J: Not really, because we don't really know those bands. New York is not that intertwined band-wise. I guess the noise scene is, the more hardcore-ish, punk bands. But indie and pop bands, not really. I mean they play together but it's not really a scene.

TAF: Do you feel like that perhaps the situation is more conducive to your gaining an acceptance in the mainstream? With all these buzz-bands coming out of NY sharing a similar strain of DNA with yourselves?

J: It's possible, yeah, it's weird. I have no idea how we fit into it, because maybe we've been around longer than some of these bands. When we started it was pretty much just us and A Place To Bury Strangers doing this kind of thing.

TAF: And what's the dynamic in the band? You both write I believe...

Y: It's about a fifty-fifty collaboration I would say. He comes to me with melodies, song ideas, lyrics and vice-versa. We argue a lot and push for ideas and sometimes my ideas make it and sometimes his do. You never know what you're going to end up with in the end. We try not to take anything personally because in the end what's important is the music, so as long as we can agree that something sounds great it doesn't matter whose idea it was in the first place.

J: Yeah, we split it up pretty equally. Everything gets written in a different way. One of us will come up with something and we'll work it out in the rehearsal space. And since there are only two of us we both play everything, I'll play drums, she'll play drums, keyboards. Yuki is a sick drummer actually.

TAF: Is it a fairly amicable process?

Y: I understand it's very hard not to take things personally because it *is* a very personal process; writing music, making music. You throw everything you have into it. But it's important to draw that line for yourselves, otherwise it can become too much for anyone.

TAF: There's something in your bio about discovering the melody to Blind Little Rain whist on mushrooms. Is that right?

J: We were on vacation and we don't really do drugs, haven't taken drugs for a while, and a friend of ours had these mushrooms. We took the mushrooms and everything was fine, I had this melody in my head, which I was actually able to remember, and that became the last song (on the album). But *after* that, we were all in such a good mood and we were walking through the woods, it was on an island. We found this baby bird that had fallen out of its nest and was lying twitching on the grass. It was really pitiful, and we felt so bad for it that we picked it up and carried through

the woods and into town to find a box for it. And this woman at the restroom, I mean we were all out of our minds at the time, was like, "this thing is dead, you have to put it out of its misery. So we took it back into the woods and we were going to run it over with the car. And everyone else chickened out and they all ran out of the car screaming, we were all hyper-sensitive obviously, so I bit the bullet and ran over the baby bird. It was a serious bummer, I mean I'm a vegetarian, I don't eat anything or kill anything, it was really traumatic, so that's the end of psychedelic drugs for my lifetime.

Y: It was really traumatic and awful, we were in tears by the end of it, so if it's any lesson, y'know, don't do drugs. At least past the age of 25, once you start to experience the flashbacks it's too much.

TAF: It's a sign from God, clearly. Wasn't 'Strawberries' or the phrase, "strawberries stop talking' also inspired by food-related trips?

J: Yeah, Yuki likes to say this. I was sick on tour, I don't know whether I'd eaten something bad or was just sick, but I was just miserable and feverish and I had that phrase in my head and was like, "we have to write a song about that."

TAF: So is there a rule that you have to have one food-inspired hallucinatory experience per album?

J: Yeah, we have to make at least one song...no, I'd rather not go through either of those experiences again to be honest.

TAF: You don't want to be purposefully eating food on the turn just to get a little inspiration.

J: That would be horrifying...

TAF: Yuki, any female musicians you find particularly inspiring?

Y: Oh, it's going to sound really nerdy, but there's a Spanish pianist called Alicia De La Rocha that I always really loved. She's small in stature like myself and I was always told by my piano teachers that "good things come in small packages" so I'd like to believe that. And definitely Bjork, she's amazing, an amazing singer, amazing front-person. I like Siouxsie Sioux a lot actually, the whole tough girl thing, I love that she's such a bad-ass.

TAF: And you're on the same label as Bjork now, so maybe they could sort out a collaboration?

Y: Apparently she hates guitars, so I don't know about that. But I can admire her from afar.

TAF: Any extra-curricular activities going on for either of you at the moment? Future plans?

J: No time.

Y: Actually we did a little bit of writing for a movie and that was a lot of fun, I could do that again. It's this movie by friends of ours called *Treeless Mountain* and it's been getting great reviews and been in a couple of festivals so I wish them all the best, y'know, I really hope their film gets picked up. The director's name is So-Yong Kim, she's a Korean American director, she also went to Sundance I think two years ago and her film *Inbetween Days* did very well, and picked up a Spirit of Independence award. That's been interesting. We wrote fresh material for it and in the end we liked some of it so much that it ended up on the album. We re-arranged it and wrote lyrics for it and it became the first track on *Hush*.

Hush is out in the UK in Feb 09.
www.myspace.com/asobiseksu

Vivian Girls

Words: Pavla Kopecna | Photos: Ren Rox
Styling: Vanessa Roberts | Hair: Bianca Tuovi | Make-up: Kate Lindsey

Imagine if The Shangri-Las and The Ramones had three baby daughters who grew up to form a punk band in Brooklyn and you get Vivian Girls – the 21st century girl group taking the world by storm with heartsick lyrics, kick-ass rhythms and a hell of a lot of reverb....

TAF: Hello, how are you? Do you mind introducing yourselves?

Katy: I'm Katy, I play bass and sing.

Ali: I'm Ali, I play drums and sing.

Cassie: I'm Cassie, I play guitar and sing.

TAF: Where are your nicknames from?

Katy: I was named Kickball Katy, by a group of people in Rochester, New York in 2002,because I was in a super secret kickball society, which I can't really talk about.

Cassie: My friend Katy Ford gave me the name Casssie Ramone in 2003, because I had a black bowl cut and watched *Rock 'n' Roll High School* like every day. I was a weirdo!

Ali: I'm just Ali.

Katy: These nicknames aren't because of the band at all, they're just us. When Ali joined, people were like "what's your name gonna be?", but it's not like that. Also Frankie Rose [founding member and former drummer] was her name, not like a Vivian Girls name.

TAF: Last time we interviewed you, you said that Vivian Girls the name came about because Frankie's mom is called Vivian, but that's not quite the whole story is it?

Katy: That's true but it's really because of the Henry Darger story called T*he Story of the Vivian Girls, in What is known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinnian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion*. Fucked Up also have a song called Vivian Girls, but that's also unrelated, like the Comet Gain song.

TAF: How did you meet and how did Vivian Girls come about?

Cassie: I was living in Brooklyn, which is also where I went to school. I hung out at this house called The Orphanage and Frankie lived there. And every

weekend we'd all go out to have brunch together. And one day when we were having brunch with a bunch of people, Frankie said, "Cassie do you wanna start a band?" And I was like "ok". And we started practising but then we still needed a bass player, so I asked Katy, who was my friend from high school.

TAF: Are you both from New York?

Katy: New Jersey.

TAF: Vivian Girls seem to have their own unique sound, but you've been described as belonging to many different genres; some people put you firmly in the C-86 box while others compare you to sixties girl groups...

Ali: At this show in San Francisco, someone came up and said it was like the Beach Boys mixed with The Ramones, with bangs. And I was really flattered by that comment.

Katy: I think that people like grouping us a lot more than we like grouping us. We don't think about that when we write songs at all. I think that's why we fit into so many different categories, because that's not what we're thinking about. So we mix all those genres together accidentally and people love pointing that out.

Cassie: People tend to say "Vivian Girls – Shop Assistants, blah blah blah", but we never even heard of them before people started comparing us to them. Our influences are almost completely in punk, and girl groups and old pop songs. Which is probably what The Shop Assistants' influences were too.

Ali: We listen to all different kinds of music, and I think that comes out when we write music together as we all write different parts and we take what we all like from that.

TAF: Who likes what?

Ali: We all like pop music.

Cassie: I really like The Wipers and sixties girl groups.

Katy: [finishing Cassie's sentence] And The Ramones.

Cassie: [laughing] Can I answer this for myself?

Katy: I like pop. And punk. But not pop punk.

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Ali: I like pop punk.

Katy: I like some pop punk.

TAF: Where does all the reverb come from?

Katy: We do put it in on purpose. When we first started, we wanted to be a fast melodic punk band. And then when we recorded our first demo with our friends Craig and Mike from the band Punchback, they recommended that we put reverb on the back-up vocals to kind of sound like an angelic choir, and then Frankie said – "oh let's put it on all the vocals." So we did, and we were like "Oh Black Tambourine does that, that's cool, it sounds sweet."

TAF: Have you stuck with that?

Katy: Yeah, we like angelic choirs.

Cassie: It's a really good effect.

TAF: Have you had anyone do guest vocals on your records?

Cassie: No, but we did some guest

vocals on Fucked Up's new record *The Chemistry of Common Life*. And we did some back-ups on Black Dog's album. It was really fun. I like being a guest vocalist.

Katy: We all like singing.

TAF: You've had a busy year; touring lots and lots as well as recording your debut album. How would you describe 2008 for Vivian Girls? What have been the highlights and lowlights?

Katy: A whirlwhind! This fall has been the most intense couple of months of my life. The lowlights have been the highlights. It's crazy, just indescribable. Playing shows, travelling, being home for like a week. It's all the downsides and upsides of being really busy. I feel very motivated and productive but it's also exhausting. And we keep getting into hilarious situations like this morning, when we were driving here from Brixton with a sat nav that was set to demo mode. So we just kept driving around in circles while trying to get the hang of driving on the wrong side of the road too.

Cassie: It could be nice to be home more, but I feel like then I'd fall into this slump of laziness, and I don't want to do that. I like being busy.

Katy: We all really like what we're doing and we just want to carry on.

TAF: Your debut album is out now, and you'll be recording the second one in Spring. Can you tell us what we might expect?

Cassie: It's going to be a little bit more depressing than the first album. The songs are more intricate and have more parts, just because we've been playing for a lot longer together now.
Katy: The tempos are more varied.

TAF: Can you give us a sneak preview?

Katy: There's a song about being in a lake house and the water rising up and killing you. And there's more about romance.

TAF: And who are you working with on the new album?

Cassie: Steve MacDonald and his wife Anna Wanaker. Steve is friends with Larry who runs In The Red [the label Vvian Girls are on]. And I think Steve mentioned to Larry he wanted to produce our second album a while ago.

TAF: Do you do any of the mixing?

Katy: For the first album, we had somebody record it for us, so we were there with him mixing it together and we didn't have a producer.

Cassie: We kind of all produced together; us and the recording engineer.

Katy: For a couple of our 7"s we recorded them on GarageBand in our living rooms and basements, so we mixed everything ourselves. For the second album we're gonna have somebody else being more hands on. But we're still gonna be there.

Cassie: I'm really excited because I find a lot of the parts of mixing to be very tedious. "Is the guitar loud enough, is the bass loud enough?" Just making sure the levels are all right is most tedious.

Katy: I really like that part, but the part that I'm most excited about is

that if we want to get a certain sound, we don't really know that much about it, so someone who has had more experience recording can say "this is what we can do to get that sound."

TAF: Your 7" Surf's Up is out now, which you put out yourselves. How did you come to start your label?

Katy: We had a month of free time, so we thought – let's start a label! So we just screened a thousand covers and made a thousand t-shirts and put it out.

Cassie: We tried to think – what's something that not many bands do these days, like offer this crazy package with t-shirts and everything. It was really fun. And we don't have jobs, so we had he time to play with it.

TAF: Do you have plans to put out other records on your label?

Katy: For now, we're so busy, we wouldn't want other people depending on us as a record label, but one day when Vivian Girls stop touring so much, we'd love to.

Ali: And we're gonna carry on releasing albums on In The Red, but for our little projects like 7"s we'd love to use our own little label.

TAF: How would you compare playing live with recording?

Katy: It's harder to achieve live, but we're slowly figuring it out.

Cassie: But at the same time I'd say we're more of a live band than a recorded band. We're not like masters of soundscapes or anything. We're really just all about the songs, so when we play them live, it's a lot more immediate than the album.

Ali: There's more energy live, I think. It's more nerve wrecking because you can make mistakes, but it's more fun because you can feed off of the energy of the crowd.

TAF: Where would you like to tour you haven't been before?

Cassie: I want to play a show in every US state; Alaska, Wyoming, Hawaii...

Katy: I'd like to go to Sweden in the summer, and Japan and Australia.

TAF: There's been such a buzz about new (often reverby) bands coming out from New York...

Ali: And you have a Cause Co-motion button on!

TAF: Oh that's right! Love them. What local bands do you like?

Ali: Cause Co-motion.

Cassie: Woods, The Beats, Pink Reason.

Katy: Crystal Stilts. We all have a rough edge to us, which ties us all together. And we all hang out, we're all friends. The Pains of Being Pure At Heart who are playing with us tonight are in that scene too.

TAF: Tell us about your first video - it's kind of hypnotic..

Cassie: The director is one of my best friends, Timothy Fiore. We met when we were in our first year at Pratt, but he dropped out to film a pilot for a children's television show.

Katy: He's our room mate.

Cassie: He's a really good film maker, so I asked him and he said yes and we had an elephant brainstorming session. The scene in the woods is the best, because that's all our friends and we were just drinking beer and hanging out.

Katy: It was filmed in my parents' back yard in New Jersey.

Cassie: The concept was like, we're driving in the woods, it's kind of scary but also very campy. Kind of like the scene in *Clockwork Orange*, where they're driving, but a whole lot campier than that.

TAF: A lot of your lyrics are about boys and love. What's your viewpoint on that?

Cassie: I guess if you read the lyrics, you can figure out the viewpoint. The viewpoint on boys is....

Katy: ....that boys are just as confused as we are?

Cassie: I don't know, maybe that love is the worst.

Ali: ...and the best.

TAF: Where do you get inspiration for your songs?

Cassie: It's a combination of our experiences and the feelings about those experiences. It's not so much about something, but more about what you feel about something. It's kind of more about dwelling on the past rather than the present, like trying to expel all your negative emotions through song writing.

TAF: Like therapy?

Cassie: Well....yeah...exactly.

TAF: Are there other girl musicians that you really admire?

Cassie: Both the Shangri-Las and The Shirelles we really admire. They're our two favourite girl groups.

Katy: The Shirelles, because they're from North Jersey – represent!

Cassie: The Shangri-Las because they're from Queens, and they're total bad girls. They're like The Ramones of the 1960s, but girls – which is so cool. I really like Babes in Toyland too, because they slay – they're so good at their instruments. They're kind of an acquired taste, but once you get into it...

Katy: I didn't like them at first, but now I really like them. We're really into watching their videos on YouTube, which are awesome.

TAF: What about some of the newer bands?

Cassie: Mika Miko are AWESOME.

TAF: Are you much into the whole Riot Grrl genre?

Ali: I am definitely. I have a Bikini Kill tattoo.

TAF: You all have really amazing tattoos. What's the story behind them? Did you get any of them together?

Cassie: Thank you! We got the burger and milkshake together.

Katy: My milkshake goes with her burger!

www.myspace.com/viviangirlsnyc

The Shop Assistants

Words: Elaine Tierney

Liking The Shop Assistants is like an indiepop secret handshake- you meet someone, establish you both love the band and it's the beginning of a beautiful friendship. (No one who likes the Shop Assistants can ever be a thoroughly bad egg.) David Keegan, the band's guitarist, main songwriter and only constant member, kindly agreed to answer some questions ...

TAF: Could you tell us a little about the early days of the band? To begin with you were called Buba and The Shop Assistants, right...

David Keegan: I was living in Edinburgh when I started the band and saw Aggi's fanzine *Juniper Berry Berry*. I was amazed because it featured all these bands I really liked, like Swell Maps and the TV Personalities, and bands I'd never heard of like The Pastels. It felt like they were kindred spirits, so I made a tape of my own songs, which Stephen heard and really liked. One of his friends was setting up a label and asked if we'd do a record for it. That was the Buba and The Shop Assistants single ['Something to Do'] with Stephen and Aggi and Marie and John, who weren't in the band after that.

Then we got asked to do another record- when Alex [Taylor] was in the band. For a while it was just me and Alex, so we decided that we needed to get a proper band together. At this point we hadn't really done any concerts, so we tried out a few members- we did a few concerts one Christmas with The Pastels and Primal Scream on the same bill. Some time after that we got the proper band together- Sarah [Kneale], Ann [Donald] and Laura [McPhail], and did the first EP. That would have been about April 1985.

TAF: You seem to have had a pretty close relationship with The Pastels throughout yr career...

DK: Stephen and I have been really good friends since late 1983. We played with them on what would have been their first proper tour- it was six dates and was really brilliant. It had a really crusading spirit to it although I'm not sure how many people actually went to the concerts. And it seemed like everyone who was at those concerts was either already in a band or formed a band.

TAF: What were you trying to achieve – were you trying to make music that wasn't possible in more mainstream parts of the music industry?

DK: I don't know what we were trying to achieve- there wasn't a set plan. Everything that happened seemed to happen by accident. I guess we were just trying to have fun and play music that felt natural to us: obviously this was influenced by the kind of music we were all listening to, like The Ramones. Sex Pistols. Sixties stuff. A lot of Rough Trade stuff. Kleenex. The Raincoats. I saw the Raincoats at Reading with the Pastels. Amazing- one of the best gigs I've ever been to. It's funny. I never really think of that Raincoats/Swell Maps side ever coming out in the music. It was much more Ramones based- especially as the obsession grew!

TAF: You also helped found the record label 53rd and 3rd, which is of course named after the Ramones song. How did you get involved with that?

DK: My involvement was mainly to do with putting the 'Safety Net' single out. I didn't have a huge input apart from that- although I did design the sticker for the Beat Happening single! It was more Stephen saying he'd heard a band and me saying, 'That's great!' Now, I kind of think we should have stuck with 53rd and 3rd to do the LP.

TAF: How do you feel about 53rd and 3rd being latterly so revered? It's a bit of a legend as far as indie labels are concerned...

DK: I find it quite funny in a way. It did do some good things. I'm not a massive fan of some of the stuff we put out but there was some really great stuff.

TAF: What was it actually like doing yr own album, *Will Anything Happen*? You did it for a major, Chrysalis, or one of their subsidiaries...

DK: It was all a bit strange because we really wanted to be on Creation, but they didn't think we were ready for an LP and offered us the opportunity to do a mini-LP instead. We were getting offers from left, right and centre at the time and we had plenty of songs, so stuck with the idea of doing the LP. And then we got an offer from Rough Trade, which was really exciting as all the bands I loved had been on the label. It seemed ideal. We were all set to do the next single on Rough Trade when Geoff Travis turned around and said he was starting up a label via Chrysalis: if we signed with that instead, we'd have a much bigger recording budget. It seemed like a really great offer, but then Chrysalis didn't want to sign us because we didn't have a manager. (We'd never had a manager.) And it turned out to be a big mistake.

We kind of rushed the LP itself. It was stupid: we had a decent budget to record it, but some awful band had block-booked the studio we wanted to use. It was the one where Steve Albini had recorded The Breeders, but I can't remember its name now. In the end, we just used a cheap demo studio near where I stayed. It was pure laziness and it kind of shows really. We didn't spend enough time

getting nice performances. If you listen to the 'Safety Net' single, I think that the playing on that song is really nice. On the album, I think the slow songs sound best. The faster songs just sound really throwaway: we just kept playing them faster and faster. It's almost like we just wanted to get it over with. In retrospect signing on a major label spoiled things, but at the time it seem like the right thing to do.

TAF: How do you feel about the recent reissue of the album on Cherry Red?

DK: It was quite odd because I've been speaking to Stephen about reissuing the singles on a compilation, which makes more sense to me. Cherry Red wanted to do the reissue with some of the older singles, but I couldn't see them sitting that well with EP. We're still planning to do the compilation, which should be really, really good- especially if we manage to get hold of some of the Radio 1 sessions. With the *LP* and EPs, [the compilation] would be complete and I've got demos too. They're pretty raw, but they're much, much nicer recordings as they're from before we started playing too fast! Sometimes the first time you record a song turns out the best before it gets too overdone.

TAF: I'm a big fan of cover versions. And The Shop Assistants did some of my favourite ones. Do you ever get to know what the original artist thought? You've talked about playing faster and faster: how do you think that worked with a song like, 'What a Way to Die'?

DK: I'd love it if Suzi Quatro ever heard our version! With that one, we were really into the *Pebbles* albums and all those sixties compilations. 'What a Way to Die' was on one of the more obscure compilations, every song on it was an absolute winner, and that song really suited us. For our compilation, I have a recording of the first time we ever played it and it sounds so funny. Really 'falling to bitsy'!

TAF: Ok, I'm going to ask the really obvious question. As one of the bands on the *NME*'s tape, how do you feel about C-86? Are you surprised that people still use it as convenient critical touchstone to talk about a certain type of music?

DK: I find it really surprising because if you actually listen to that tape it doesn't really represent a genre. It's more like, 'Some bands that were around in 1986 on small labels'. I don't think I ever sat down and listened to the C-86 tape the whole way through...

TAF: I don't think many people have!

DK: And that's what it makes it even stranger that it's used as some kind of badge. In retrospect, we should have sat down and thought of a better name for what we were doing! When we were doing the tour with The Pastels our tour-bus hobby was looking for people with stripy t-shirts: the kind of people we thought might be into us. Maybe that's a better term than C-86!

TAF: The original line up of The Shop Assistants broke up in '86 before you reformed with different personnel in '89, right?

DK: Alex left at the end of '86 to do Motorcycle Boy. We had some touring commitments in Europe, which we did, but then it kind of petered out. I have to say, I was pretty disillusioned about the whole thing. You spend yr teens thinking about being in a band and thinking that would be best thing you could ever do and I so wanted to make records, but when it actually happened it...didn't end up feeling very nice.

TAF: Did you have a different agenda when you reformed?

DK: When we did that wee tour in 1990- that was actually fantastic. We mostly played new stuff with a couple of old songs. They were the best gigs we ever played- possibly because we were better at playing. And we did a tour with The Desperados and it's really nice to play with a band yr good friends with. There were really big audiences and we seemed to go down really well. It was really fun- unlike the tour we did to promote the album. I don't know what we were thinking! We had about four support bands and paid for them all to stay in hotels. It ended up being a bit of a mess. On that last tour in 1990, we forgot to change the rider [from the album tour] so ended up with enough beer for four bands when it was just us!

TAF: What were you up to during the hiatus? I've read somewhere that you were a ski instructor...

DK: Yeah, that's when I got back into skiing, which I'd done loads of when I was a teenager in the Highlands. So I thought it'd be fun to get back into that and make a living out of it. So that's pretty much what I did! It was fairly aimless- apart from trying to ski as many days of the year as I could.

TAF: And finally, how does it feel being such a big influence on a younger generation of musicians? Do you ever get sick of having been in two cult bands, the Pastels and The Shop Assistants?

DK: I don't really think about it much to be honest! The Pastels have always been influential in their various incarnations, but I hadn't really thought of The Shop Assistants in the same way. It's been quite interesting to hear that we have. I knew that in Edinburgh that we'd been a bit of a catalyst at the time, but it's really cool that people who weren't even born at the time are into us.

TAF: And bands from outside the UK too. Have you heard Liechtenstein from Gōtenborg in Sweden?

DK: I haven't heard Liechtenstein, but I saw an interview in yr magazine with a band from Norway, who mentioned us...

TAF: Je suis animal?

DK: Yeah, that's them. Stephen told me that someone had set up a Shop Assistants myspace and they were one of the bands on it. They sound really, really great. There's some quite funny ones too: like that American band Fucked Up. They sent us a 7" single with their cover of 'I Don't Want To Be Friends With You'. On the b-side, it's their main singer and girl bass player doing a note for note cover of that single. It's bizarre because they're this big, scary punk rock band but say The Shop Assistants were a big influence!

myspace.com/shopassistants001

Gina Birch

Words: Elaine Tierney

The Raincoats formed in 1977 when Gina Birch (vocal, bass) and Ana da Silva (vocals, guitar) met at Hornsey Art College in north London. As an all-female post-punk band, with original Slits' drummer Palmolive and Vicky Aspinall on violin, they recorded their classic eponymous debut: an irresistible mix of unusual rhythms, distinctive vocal, sincerity and candour. Subsequent albums (Odyshape, Moving) proved equally open-minded, evolving the crucially controlled dissonance that is one of the hallmarks of The Raincoats' sound. Hearing the band for the first time was one of my personal thunderbolt moments. As an invariably awkward 13-year-old, they sounded like nothing else and I fell for them hard. Unlike most teenage romances, this one has lasted, so it was with some trepidation I settled down to ask Gina Birch a few questions...

TAF: How did it all begin?

Gina Birch: I met Ana [da Silva] at Hornsey school of Art in September 1976. I had just arrived in London, from Nottingham. Ana had been living in London for a year or two already but had been in Portugal for the summer with her family and arrived a little late to start the course. She had really, really long hair and was tanned from the Portuguese summer sun. I, on the other hand, was whiter than white, with shoulder length crinkled blonde hair and skinny jeans and was hoping for a bit more fun than seemed to be on offer at Alexandra Palace. We found that we were living not too far from each other. I had moved into a squat just off Westbourne Grove, and Ana lived just off Golborne Road- both miles from college.

I felt very lost when I first came to London: I had been quite at home in Nottingham, I knew tons of people, I knew my way around and suddenly I was this tiny speck and I was lonely and London was quite grim at that time. I first lived near Upper Street, and it was really gloomy. I was so glad when I got the chance to move to near Queensway. It was a sunny day when I came to see the squat: a new friend, Neal Brown had invited me to live in above him in his house. It was a bank holiday and it was really humming and I thought this is more like it. I walked round to the house: a really crumbling, once white, old building and loved my two little rooms, plaster falling off the wall, mushrooms growing on the toilet wall, only cold water from the tap. I then met my neighbours Richard Dudanski and Esperanza (Palmolive's sister), discovered the squat 'Tea Room' where I could eat for a few pence, and which was full of groovy people and soon I began to find my feet!

TAF: What kinds of music were you listening to at the time? You've mentioned before that the experience of seeing The Slits play live encouraged you to form a band of yr own...

GB: I had a Bush mono record player, a few records and a tiny radio. After a few months I bought a bit of new technology, a portable cassette recorder!

At that particular time the most vibrant energy that I could find in London seemed to come from the music scene around the Roxy club, The Sex Pistols, the Clash, Subway Sect, Chelsea, The Cortinas, and then finally the Slits. Of course we also liked a lot of stuff that was coming from America, particularly Patti Smith, The Ramones, and then Television and many others. Devo.. all sorts. Pre-punk we had listened to a variety of stuff from Ska to Velvet Underground, to Melanie, Bob Dylan, the Beatles, Dusty Springfield, Bob Marley.

TAF: London in the late seventies has received a fair amount of critical and historical attention, and so much great, interesting music seems to have been produced at the time. Could you tell us a little about yr experience of living there and why you think place and time seemed to encourage such a high level of creativity?

GB: I don't know really, except for some reason that there was a collision of ideas at that time, people wanting to create something of our own, not something we had to observe, but something we could participate in, skilled or not. We were welcomed and we welcomed others who had similar desires to make stuff that was not phoney or too wanky, just here and now, and honest and feisty and in our case challenging certain ideas that might have normally kept us as young women, out.

TAF: The Raincoats are typically described as having learnt to play in public. Did this 'non-technique' make you more open-minded as musicians? It certainly sounds that way...

GB: Yes. I always say I learned on stage. We played our first gig about a couple of weeks after I bought my first bass guitar and tried to learn to play it. I think we had about three or four songs.

We didn't try to have double verse chorus, verse chorus, bridge, chorus chorus etc. We didn't know or even particularly want to know about that. It made me feel very vulnerable, not the feisty punk attitude I would like to have been able to display, and perhaps that's what set us apart a bit, later linking us to other more 'vulnerable' post-punk bands.

TAF: The Raincoats were one of the first bands on Rough Trade. A lot has been written about the early years of the label, but what was it like? Geoff Travis even produced some of yr earliest releases...?

GB: Ana had met Geoff, so through that he took some interest in us, and fairly soon thought we could try to make a single. Our first effort was abandoned and then when we had Vicky and Palmolive in the band, we were ready to make something a bit more special. Mayo Thompson and Geoff produced the single and the first album, and it was great fun working with them. We recorded the single in a tiny basement studio in Cambridge where many of those first Rough Trade singles were recorded. The album though was recorded in London- [it was] too crazy to have us commute to Cambridge, so we recorded in Berry St studios in London. Rough Trade was friendly and trying to tread a different path from the usual business model, but it was fraught with difficulties, arguments and discussions that we were not really party to, but were aware of from time to time. Mostly though it was friendly and supportive and many bands hung out there, in the shop or in the label behind the shop. Ana worked in the shop for quite a while, as did Epic Soundtracks from Swell Maps.

TAF: Vicky Aspinall's violin is one of the first elements that struck me when I first heard The Raincoats. It's kind of like a controlled discord, and I really like that thing you said about The Raincoats and Red Crayola- that both bands 'take something quite normal and twist it out of alignment'. Could you talk a little more about this?

GB: In The Raincoats we [tried to make something we] hadn't quite heard before, but [which] appealed to our sensibilities- something funny or strange- or [that sound came from] just copying something and failing and making something of our own. But I also think I took the notion of not trying to be a virtuoso quite seriously and I loved the concept of the Ting Theatre of Mistakes- that through mistakes all kinds of mysteries are unveiled or revealed. Later I came to like the idea of challenging the 'experts', those experts who hate to be challenged, not the smart ones who embrace a challenge and grow and learn themselves from it.

TAF: My little sister grew up on yr cover of 'Lola' and only heard the Kinks' original for the first time this year. (She likes The Raincoats' version much better.) What made you decide to cover that song? Do you have any idea what Ray Davies thinks of yr version?

GB: I always say it was Ana's idea to cover Lola, but she says it was mine or Vicky's. Who knows, it was in the air! Ray Davies, when asked about our version (jokingly I think, although maybe not), said that he preferred someone to take an album track of his (like Chrissie Hynde and the Pretenders with 'Stop Your Sobbing') and make it a hit, rather than taking a hit and making it an album track. No word on the sensibilities of the recording!

TAF: I'm a big fan of Red Crayola in its various incarnations: what was it like working with Mayo Thompson? Did being in that band give you an opportunity to explore other ways of making music that being in the Raincoats didn't allow?

GB: Working with Mayo was very different from The Raincoats because he doesn't spend hours exploring collectively. He had already done his 'thinking' and he liked the naiveté that we, the young musicians, displayed. It kept him on his toes in a way. And we continued to twist things out of shape in a very particular way. We have just done some amazing recordings that will hopefully surface in 2009.

TAF: I like what Ana wrote in a Rough Trade information booklet that, 'Being a woman is both feeling female, expressing female and also (for the time being at least) reacting against what a woman is told she "should" be like.' What was it like being a young woman making music in the late seventies and eighties? Have you seen any appreciable improvement during yr career in how the music industry treats women? What still needs to be done?

GB: I have just been reading Naomi Wolfe's *Promiscuities*, a brilliant book about the transition from girlhood to womanhood. It's all in there - you better read it! Being a young woman making music at that time was both exhilarating, and hideous because we knew we were upsetting people, by our inability or unwillingness to conform and then also paying a price for swimming against the tide. I would write more on this but I just don't have the time right now!

TAF: The second Raincoats' album *Odyshape* is replete with unusual rhythms. I've read that you started picking up odd instruments from junk shops, and the album seems particularly influenced by things like Ornette Coleman and non-European music. Robert Wyatt even contributed percussive sounds! Could you tell us a bit about why the band started moving in that direction: what were you trying to achieve musically?

GB: We were just trying to grow and move on from where we were. As we found our feet, we tried to expand our horizons but not by becoming brilliant at one instrument, but by finding new ways to make mistakes! (Joke!)

TAF: Usually live albums feel like a bit of a con, but I absolutely love *The Kitchen Tapes*. Could you tell us a bit more about that concert...

GB: Yes, *The Kitchen Tapes*. We were never that thrilled with them, but they are the one thing that has never gone out of circulation. When we went to New York to play, we ran out of money and couldn't afford to get back, so we had to sign a deal to have this live cassette, and, thus we had little control over it, never thinking it would be the thing by which more people know us that anything else.

TAF: Like a lot of people my age, I partly discovered The Raincoats through Kurt Cobain's total reverence for the band. What was it like being admired by a younger generation of musicians? You were even meant to tour with Nirvana...

GB: It was a total surprise to us. We never did get to tour with Nirvana, as Kurt killed himself just before the tour happened.

TAF: What was it like recording again? Did yr earlier experiences as a musician make you want to do things differently with the Raincoats' album on Geffen?

GB: Geffen gave us quite a lot of money and then said we had to spend it on an expensive studio and an expensive producer. We wanted Polly Harvey to produce it, but that didn't work out. In the end, we worked with Ed Buller and made a great album, but it is quite heavily produced and cost more money than it should have. sBig labels are crazy sometimes. More money does not make better art/product!

TAF: You also make music videos and studied film at the Royal College. Do you see a discernible overlap in yr practice as a musician and a filmmaker?

GB: I don't know. What do you think? I love Derek Jarman and his approach to work/life. The boundaries between things are not that strict, [they're] usually quite fluid in my case.

TAF: What are you up to at the moment? Any plans to perform in the near future?

GB: I am doing a lot of different projects right now: The Raincoats DVD; several music videos; a collaboration with Sarah Sarhandi (a dance film with her beautiful viola compositions); an art piece with film and wall based work, and a bit of teaching at Westminster University.

I am also doing a few live shows as Gina Birch, and The Raincoats have been invited to play a couple of festivals in Spring 2009.

www.myspace.com/ theraincoats
www.myspace.com/ ginabirch

MARINE GIRLS

Words: Michael White

Whatever your personal definition of indiepop, it likely accommodates mention of Marine Girls. Alongside the Postcard Records stable of artists and the likes of The Raincoats and Delta 5, the teenage quartet's music was both an extension of punk and a path beyond it — gentle but assured, alternately humourous and romantic, and unashamedly feminine. Although the band lasted little more than two years (1981-'83), its influence has spanned the globe and endured for more than 25 years, thanks largely to the songs' unique charm, and also to the ongoing success of Tracey Thorn. Gina Hartman is perhaps among the most obscure aspects of the Marine Girls biography, despite having co-founded the band with Tracey and sung on their debut cassette, A Day By the Sea, *and official debut album,* Beach Party. *She unceremoniously departed soon after the latter's release (for reasons finally revealed below), after which a reconfigured trio recorded the album* Lazy Ways *and landed on the cover of Melody Maker. Happy and healthy and still making music, Gina graciously agreed to this all-too-rare interview.*

TAF: Marine Girls' music seemed diametrically opposed to punk, but it couldn't have existed without it. What did punk mean to you and Tracey when you started the band? Were you at all reluctant to make music that sounded so vulnerable and innocent?
Gina: Punk was really important to me and Tracey. We bonded over that music. We would never have formed the band without that DIY/Rough Trade ethic — it was so encouraging. I think that between us we bought nearly all of the early Rough Trade singles; we liked The Raincoats, Delta 5, Swell Maps, Kleenex/Liliput, also The Mo-dettes — all those post-punk bands. We loved the old punk bands like Buzzcocks, X-Ray Spex, early Sex Pistols and The Clash, but that music seemed like a long time before, even though it was only a couple of years previous. We didn't think about our music being vulnerable — we thought that it was as strong as the music we loved, but in a different form. Quiet can be strong, too. Our music was innocent because I suppose we were!

TAF: Punk brought about unprecedented involvement of women in music. What effect did that have on the band? Which female musicians did you admire?
G: The majority of the bands we liked were female bands or had female singers. Me and Tracey liked Pauline Murray from Penetration a lot, and, of course, Poly Styrene. The Raincoats were so important, and I think they made us think that we could be a girl band and put out our own music and fanzine.

TAF: One aspect of Marine Girls I think is extraordinary is that the worldview of the lyrics is unashamedly teenage and romantic and — I hope it's not an insult to say — female and suburban. Was this unconscious, or was it a deliberate gesture to be honest about your everyday lives, as opposed to many other bands at the time who affected a very urban, nihilistic outlook? Was it inspired at all by girl groups from the sixties?
G: Tracey wrote about the things that affected us in everyday life. We were quite skeptical teenage girls and had a bit of a low opinion and expectations of boys. The everyday was interesting to us; it seemed perfectly sensible to sing about things that were real and that affected you, as opposed to some rock 'n' roll cliché. Yes, we loved those '60s girl groups — they were an inspiration: "Remember, walking in the sand..."

TAF: I've never read any accounts about the making of *A Day by the Sea* and *Beach Party*. What can you share about it?
G: *A Day by the Sea* was recorded mainly at Jane's house in her front room after school, on a reel-to-reel tape recorder from my mum's work. It was soooo DIY— no wonder it sounds like it was actually recorded under water! We had fun doing that; I remember it involved eating a lot of boil-in-the-bag cod in butter sauce, and raw flapjack mixture! Jane's and Alice's [house] was good to record at, because they lived with their dad and he wasn't in that much after school, and we could walk to her house easily. *Beach Party* was a different affair. That was recorded by Pat Bermingham, who ran the label that *Beach Party* was first released on. He had his own recording studio at the bottom of his mum's garden in Ilford. It was in his shed! We went round at weekends and he did all the work. We loved Pat so much, and his mum used to make us cups of tea. Tracey recorded her first solo LP [*A Distant Shore*] in there, too. Pat liked dub sounds, and I think that's reflected in the spacey sound.

TAF: I've only heard one live recording of Marine Girls, and it's from after your departure (March '83 at the Lyceum). The audience is hugely supportive despite the apparent nerves of the girls and the ramshackleness of their playing. Were audiences always willing to accept the music on its own terms? Mike Alway from Cherry Red said he first saw the band in a suburban youth club. Did the band often play in unconventional venues like that?
G: We played a lot of youth clubs and village halls, and we got heckled a lot! But we could give as good as we got. Mainly, audiences were supportive, and a lot of the times filled with friends.

TAF: There are differing accounts about why you left the band. Most say it was to pursue other musical projects, but All Music Guide says you "kept missing rehearsals" and were replaced by Jane. Which is the true story, and what did you do afterward? Was it unpleasant to subsequently listen to *Lazy Ways* and observe the success that followed it?
G: Oh, that! Well, actually, it was such a silly thing. Alice had a friend that used to come to rehearsals and sort of wanted to be in the band. I thought I was gonna be pushed out to make way for her. Also, I had trouble actually physically getting to some rehearsals because I lived in a different town. Later I found out that none of the others realised this and really had no thought of replacing me. Simple lack of communication — how silly! I was a bit sad when *Lazy Ways* came out, but I was busy with other things by then. The only time it really jarred was when Marine Girls were on the front cover of Melody Maker and I saw it for sale on a newsstand in Piccadilly Circus. But other than that, not really. Musically, it was just Sindy Arthur and Doof after, and I was really involved with a boyfriend's band, Portion Control, on the same record label as us.

TAF: Marine Girls has had a subtle but enduring influence on other bands that continues to this day – from Beat Happening to Nirvana, and Riot Grrrl bands to Twee as Fuck's cover stars, Vivian Girls. Have you always maintained an awareness of younger artists referencing the band? What is it about the music that you think has given it such unexpected endurance?
G: Yes, I'm proud of our influence. I recently found out that Hole did live covers on "In Love" [from *Beach Party*]. Tobi Vale told me that her and Kurt [Cobain] used to lie awake all night listening to *Beach Party*. I've only really been aware of other bands referencing us in the past ten years or so. I think it's probably the simplicity of our music that makes it timeless. Also, emotions don't change with time.

TAF: Do you still see Tracey, Jane and Alice? Musically, what are you working on now?
G: Yes, I'm still in touch with all the others — mainly Jane and Tracey, but obviously I hear of Alice through Jane. I like the music that Tracey is making at the moment; I love her voice, and feel proud of her achievements. I'm currently making music in The Fenestration with Mark Flunder, who I've known since the begining of Marine Girls. He's been in lots of bands: TV Personalities, Cee Bee Beaumont, Sportique...We're making music with traditional instruments, but with Game Boy/8-bit backing beats, and me singing. It sounds really different, and I'm really enjoying myself doing it.

www.myspace.com/ mmarinegirls

Rose Melberg

Words: Michael White

Rose Melberg is thirty-six. But when she sits down to be interviewed in a Vancouver restaurant, she looks as though she might have just come from one of the city's college campuses after finishing the first semester of her freshman year. So youthful and unassuming is her appearance, that nothing betrays her actual history: more than fifteen years of on-off music-making renowned in indiepop circles around the world for its bounty of bravery, beauty, and considerable influence.

Yet here Melberg sits, in the neighbourhood she has called home for over two years, in a city where she remains all but anonymous. Not that she seems to mind — after all, this is an artist who has seemingly fashioned an anti-career, intended to defy expectations and short-circuit forward momentum. The truth, of course, is somewhat more complicated.

The California native became known in 1992 with her first band, Tiger Trap. The all-female quartet, formed when she was barely out of her teens, rode the crest of the then-nascent Riot Grrrl movement of feminist-minded pop-punk bands. But unlike peers such as Bikini Kill or Huggy Bear, Tiger Trap's sound was principally shaped by Melberg's love of melodic British indiepop and the girl groups of the 1960s, strained through a decidedly punk-like filter of amateurism. Their most obvious influence would seem to have been Talulah Gosh, but Melberg swears none of the band had heard them yet.

"It was really important to me, at twenty, to feel like I was a part of something bigger, and I really drew from other women musicians," Melberg says. "And yet I never saw what we were doing as political. I just wanted to be in a noisy pop band. I thought just by virtue of being women in a band was in itself political, just enough for me. The sound we ended up with really came together in a pretty organic way; there wasn't a lot of specific intention to the sound we were making because we just weren't skilled enough for that."

Tiger Trap's self-titled debut album was hugely acclaimed, but when major labels began courting the band in the midst of the post-grunge-era gold rush (a development that thrilled Melberg's bandmates), she elected to break the group up rather than become subject to corporate grooming. Remaining with Tiger Trap's label, K Records (based in Olympia) Melberg moved to nearby Portland in 1994 and effected the sonic equivalent of a 180-degree turn: a duo called The Softies. Formed with friend Jen Sbraglia, The Softies featured the two women's voices and their electric guitars. Their songs, while not all having to do with heartbreak or despair (although most of them do), sound inconsolably sad; their debut album, *It's Love*, has become a generational touchstone of sorts, the soundtrack to an underground culture's post-adolescent malaise. (Go Sailor, a trio closer in spirit to Tiger Trap, ran concurrently, but lasted little more than a year.)

"The Softies forced the music into a situation where only people who wanted to hear it were hearing it," says Melberg.

"I set out to do something that was inaccessible, that was slightly more difficult on the ear and required slightly more effort. And yet, because of that, I felt the safety to really pour my heart out.

"I think one thing that kind of upset people was that it wasn't acoustic — they expected it to be. But I didn't want to be Indigo Girls. Not to bash Indigo Girls, but I didn't want to be an acoustic duo. I wanted to be a pop band with no drums. And I knew that would definitely be something no major label was going to come looking for, which was awesome. I could fall in love with music again."

Yet while The Softies became no more than the cult success Melberg had envisioned, the devotion of that cult was more personal and of a far greater intensity than Tiger Trap's. To this day, Melberg says, when fans approach her to compliment her music, The Softies usually claim the lion's share of praise. "It's difficult for me sometimes to properly express my gratitude; not 'Thank you for being affected by my music,' but 'Thank you for telling me that,' because I've been affected by music so much and have tried to express that to other artists, and I never know if I'm being weird or creepy."

The Softies came to en end in 2001. Melberg had become a Canadian, moving to Summerland, British Columbia, in 1998 to marry and start a family. Before the duo made their final album in 2000, she played drums in short-lived Vancouver band Gaze, and released a collection of solo material called *Portola*.

Motherhood took precedence in Melberg's life during the next several years, so when she finally began writing again in 2004, setting aside a block of time each Sunday, she was concerned about what her efforts would produce – if anything at all. "It was difficult, and I was really afraid of what I would find," she says, "and I remember one thing that [K Records founder and Beat Happening frontman] Calvin Johnson said to me when I was having difficulty writing. He said, 'Rose, it's a river; it's not a well. It's not going to run dry. It's always there.'"

Recorded in Vancouver in 2005 with members of local band p:ano, *Cast Away The Clouds* was Melberg's first full-fledged solo album. Autumnal, reflective, and containing what may be lyrical hints of her failing marriage, it evidences an inevitably matured worldview, but retains the charm and youthful wonder of her earlier work. It also contains the instrument Melberg had so successfully resisted in The Softies: the acoustic guitar. "That was a big deal," she acknowledges. "It was time to do that, because when I play by myself I usually play on my acoustic. Therefore, this was a record of how I play when it's just me."

A return to single life, ongoing motherhood, and the necessity of making a livelihood for both herself and her son again brought Melberg's musical activities to a standstill, as did a computer full of works in progress, lost for a time to a dead hard drive. But she happily reveals that she's begun work on her next album. (NB: Melberg announced, shortly before this went to press, that the album has been completed. A release date hasn't been determined.) She also reveals, happier still, that a new love has done as much for her productivity as terminal melancholy did for her in The Softies.

"Right now, for whatever reason – I guess maybe it's because I'm happy – I'm writing like crazy," she enthuses. "At first I thought that I could only write when I was sad, but I finally realized: No! I can write about anything!"

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Album Review

The Pains of Being Pure At Heart

For any clued-up indiepop fan, this is one of the most eagerly anticipated albums in recent memory. After a string of pop-perfect singles and a handful of well received UK gigs, hopes for The Pains of Being Pure At Heart's self-titled debut are ridiculously high.

It's very pleasing then, to be able to report that this album lives up to, if not exceeds, any and all such expectations. From the Darklands-era Marychain fuzz of opener 'Contender' through the Sunny Sunday Smile-isms of 'Come Saturday' to the unbridled pop nous of 'Young Adult Friction', this LP produces moment after moment of sheer indiepop joy. Indeed, it's one of those albums that provokes all those journalistic cliches about "sounding like a greatest hits collection already".

Fusing the spirit of C-86 (early My Bloody Valentine, The Popguns) with the pop sensibilities of early nineties US 'bubblecrunch' bands (Velocity Girl, Black Tambourine) and occassionally even deploying the 'grungepop' guitar solo (Teenage Fanclub, Velvet Crush), this could have come across as a lifeless collection of hipster reference points - a joyless stroll through an impeccable record collection - and it's to The Pains' credit that nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, this is one of the freshest sounding debuts I've heard for a long time, and if it doesn't go on to be properly, NME-botheringly huge, then there is something fundamentally wrong with the universe. In short - the first essential purchase of 2009.

Words by Rory Mackie

Seven Sevens

Seven 7"s we can't get enough of...

Hari & Aino: A Considerate Kind of Home (Cloudberry 7")
A 'My Sharona/Hey Mickey' drum intro, a stop-start bit nicked from 'This Charming Man' and the kind of glorious melancholy synonymous with the first frosts of a Swedish winter i.e. perfect Scandipop for those long mornings spent drinking tea and watching the world go by. Rory Mackie

Vivian Girls: Surf's Up (Wild World 7")
Released on Vivian Girls' very own label Wild World, and part of a complete package containing a t-shirt and badges too, this Beach Boys cover is bound to become a highly prized collectible. It helps that the track is a joy to listen to; all dreamy reverb and lulling vocals set against the simple and familiar Beach Boys melody. Pavla Kopecna

Moscow Olympics: The Farthest City / The Morning Paper: Always Real (Lost Music Records split 7")
This gorgeous Lost Music split 7" sounds like it could have been released on 4AD circa 1983. Moscow Olympics produce an epic piece of dreampop/ shoegaze in 'The Farthest City', whilst The Morning Paper summon up the spirit of *Head Over Heels* era Cocteau Twins for their fine offering. An impressive first release from the Lost Music boys. RM

The Felt Tips, 'Bought and Sold' (Wee Pop! 7")
A vocal smack bang in the middle of Morrissey and Murdoch, Andrew - a post-grad student in sociology sings, or rather yearns for, a lost weekend in London. Right, when's the album coming out? Erik Sandberg

Aidan Moffat and the Best Ofs, 'I Got You Babe'/ 'Love is Not a Game' (Chemikal Underground Records 7")
Ok, technically this is part of the forthcoming deluxe box-set of *How to Get to Heaven from Scotland*. (Along with an LP, a CD, an EP, an old school boardgame, a monkey blowing smoke-rings and a Valentine's card signed by Aidan- and I'm only making one of those up.) It's a double-whammy of a cover (Sonny and Cher! Glen Campell!) in Moffat's inimitable shambolic style. What else d'you want? For it to cook you dinner? RT

Jonathan Richman: You Can Have A Cell Phone, That's OK, But Not Me (Vapor 7")
While it's a lovely thing to know that Jonathan Richman is still out there doing his charmingly wonky troubadour routine, you do wonder who exactly is buying his new stuff. A case in point, 'Cell Phone' is a singy-talky, slow motion strumathon that, while being perfectly adequate, inspires nothing more than a vague sense of ennui and a burning desire to put on 'She Cracked' at ear-splitting volume. RM

Little My: Little My's Seventh (Wee Pop! 7")
Another collection of unashamedly twee pop from the Cardiff-based collective, employing recorder, stylophone, glockenspiel and, on "Leaves Nothing', even glam-rock guitar! 'Sellotape My Hands' is a particular delight, calling into mind *Sinister* era Belle and Sebastian with its call-and-response vocals and lovely violin. RM

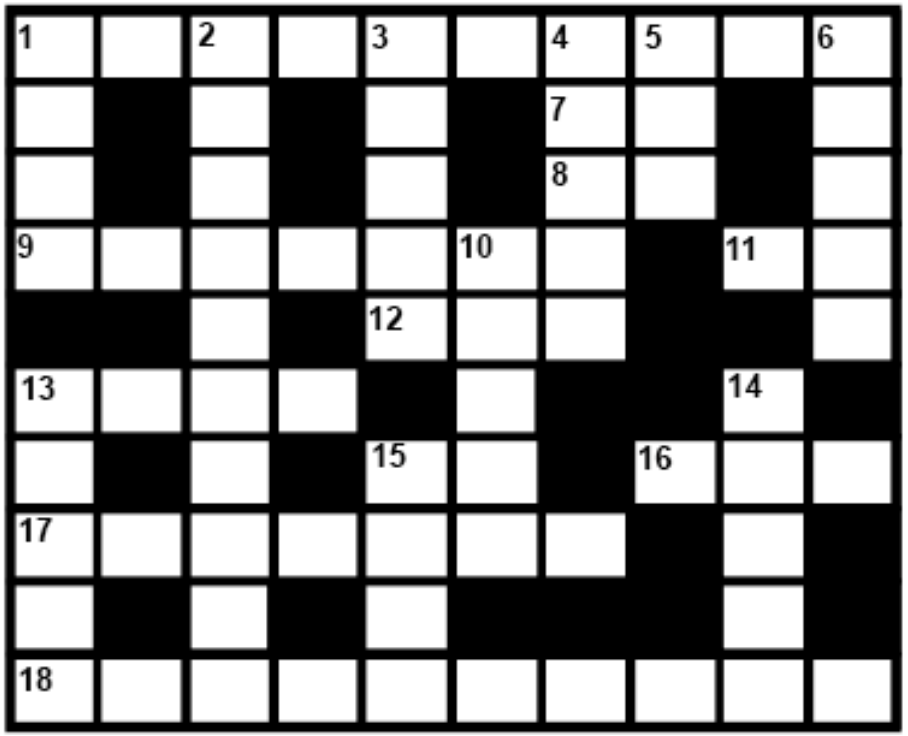
Three x Five

Five songs we'd spend our pocket money on...

Elaine:
The Carrots: Doing Our Part
The Chills: Satin Doll
Aidan John Moffat: The Boy That You Love
The Clean: Slug Song
Pulsallama: The Devil Lives in My Husband's Body

Pavla:
The Shangri-Las: Right Now, Not Later
The Fascinations: Girls Are Out To Get You
Marine Girls: A Place In The Sun
The Cooperettes: Shing-A-Ling
The Shop Assistants: I don't Want to be Friends With You

Jude Georges:
The Raincoats: Fairytale in the Supermarket
The Shirelles: Boys
Miaow: Sport Most Royal
Sharon Tandy: Hold On
Twa Toots: Yo Yo



Pop crossword by Rory Mackie

ACROSS

1. (and 18 across) .... Me. Athens, Georgia based Indiepop label, home to Cars Can Be Blue and Bunnygrunt. (5,5,8,2)
7. '.. Hope'. Track from The Vaselines' 1989 LP *Dum-Dum* (2)
8. See 15 Across.
9. (and 11 across and 2 down) "I am the son and the heir of ...." 'How Soon Is Now?', The Smiths, 1984. (7,2,10)
11. See 9 across.
12. Jonathan ... Author of *The Rotters Club* who collaborated with indiepop musician Louis Phillipe on 2001 LP *Tricatel*. (3)
13. Plus-.... Squeeze Box. Japanese Indiepop/ Picopop band that released the LP *Fakevox* in the UK in 2002. (4)
15. (and 8 across and 16 across) "She didn't fight .. .., some things are best left alone." 'A Good Idea', Sugar, 1992 (2,2,3)
16. See 15 across.
17 'We .... School'. Track from Belle and Sebastian's 1996 debut LP, *Tigermilk*. (4,3)
18. See 1 Across.

DOWN

1. 'Holiday ....' 1985 Vic Godard single covered by both Orange Juice and The Chesterfields. (4)
2. See 9 Across
3. 'The Time I Learned To ..... Fly'. Song by Tricycle Bicycle Cycle on *First Manatee Hugging Party* LP (5)
4. *The Spirit of .. ...Yet To Come*. 2008 LP by London Indie band Silent Alliance. (2,3)
5.'... Kettle Black'. Song by Tilly And The Wall from 2008 LP *O* (3)
6. ..... Marble Giants. Post-Punk band formed in Cardiff in 1978 by Alison Stratton and Phillip and Stuart Moxham. (5)
10. 'Hit The .....'. 1987 single by The Fall. (5)
13. Ex Primal Scream member Robert Young's AKA. (5)
14. Post-Punk band formed in Stroud, Gloucestershire in 1979 by Ted and Jake Milton (5).
15.'The Tenure ....'. Track from 2009 self-titled debut LP by The Pains Of Being Pure At Heart. (4)

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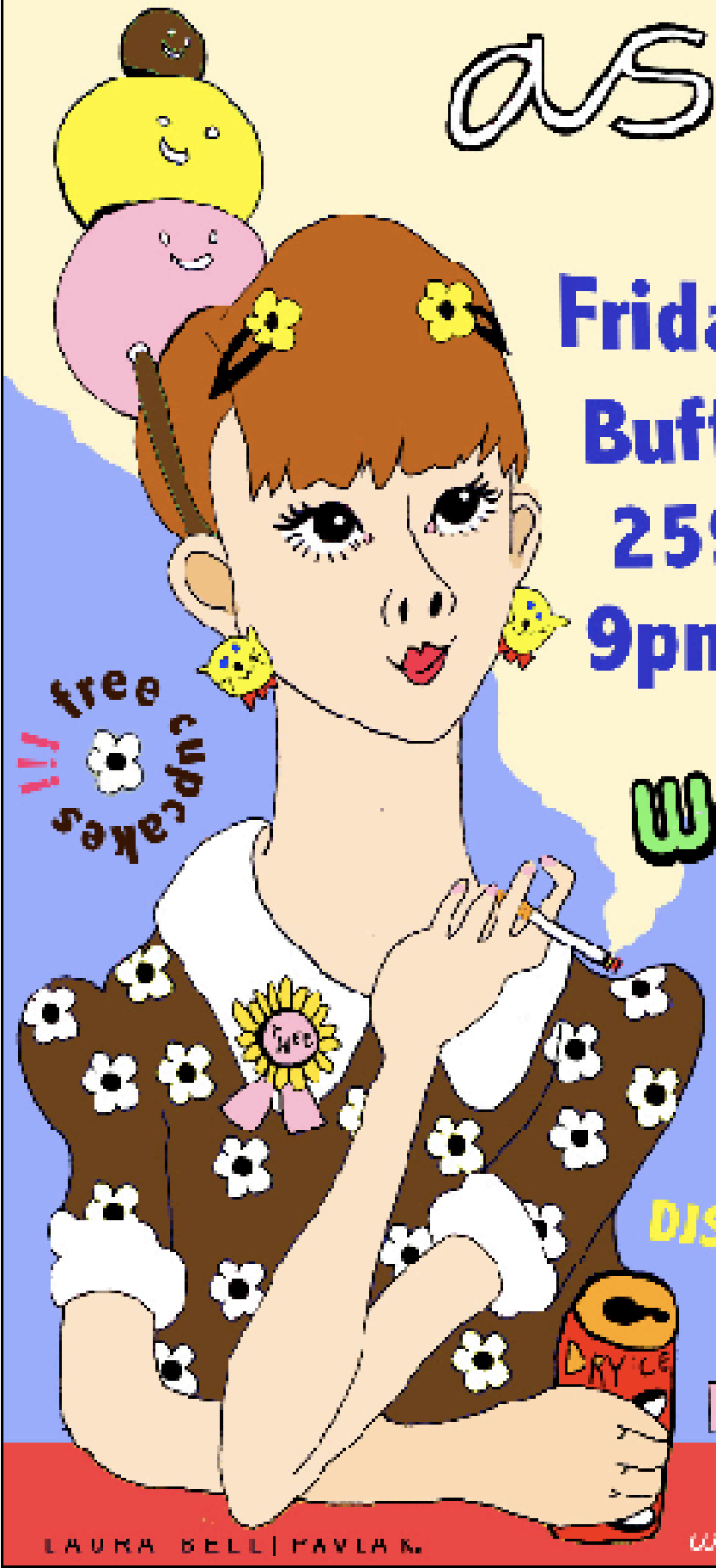

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